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8. NIE-12

DCI/IC 74-0627

28 March 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Southeast Asia NIO

SUBJECT: SNIE 57-1-3 (5 December 1973)

1. I have recently been reviewing SNIE 57-1-73, "The Short Term Prospect for Cambodia Through the Current Dry Season - May 1974". My purpose was to judge how well the community did in our analysis. Where our analysis was not particularly good, I would propose that we should seek the reasons why we fell short of the mark.

2. One key judgment in 57-1-73 was that "the KC will pursue option B, a strangulation strategy, this dry season" (p. 4). Option B was defined as "a more deliberate, but still major, campaign coordinating interdiction operations against the capital's supply lines, conventional attacks against the city's outlying defenses, and attacks against government strongholds elsewhere in an effort to force the collapse or capitulation of the GKR." (p. 3)

3. I am trying to be fair-minded about our conclusion on this matter. I find it almost inescapable that our judgment was wrong. What actually happened this winter was option C - "a modest increase in military activity designed to keep FANK on the defensive, but with no serious attempt to seek a final resolution of the situation this dry season" (p. 3 - underscoring is mine).

4. Now I know that when I say we were wrong I am taking a position which will offend many people. Analysts being human (at least most of them) understandably have a tendency to defend whatever their position was. In consequence I think there is a tendency to twist the facts of the events of this dry season into an interpretation that option B was in fact followed. -- To be fair, I ask you to consider these points:

a. "The Mekong will be the key factor in the GKR's supply situation" (p. 5). To "strangle" Phnom Penh we all know the Mekong has to be closed. Operations against routes 1 and 4 and Kompong Som just won't do it. We all know that the KC made no concerted effort this year to close the Mekong. That this is a fair statement of the facts is buttressed by the fact that not once was there a requirement to launch a "save Phnom Penh" operation as there has been in each year of the war till '74.

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b. "At a minimum, pressure on Phnom Penh's LOC's will be intense" (p. 6). The key word is, of course, "intense". Again, trying to be fair, I don't think we used the correct word in describing the KC LOC operation; "intermittent", "head-line grabbing" but not "intense". Certainly the words used in option C, "modest increase" seem to fit the situation.

c. "...there is a strong possibility that some outlying GKR strongpoints (including provincial capitals) will fall..." (p. 6). --All I can say, apropos of this is, thank God for Oudong! However, in all fairness, we were basically wrong. The threat to Kampot we must judge to be more shadow than substance. There was no head-to-head fighting there as occurred at Kompong Cham last year. Kompong Thom was not beleaguered nor was Siem Reap (anymore than they ever have been).

d. "The KC will probably control more territory and more people at the end of the dry season than they did at the beginning" (p. 7). Here I am on shakier ground because I do not have the figures. However, my sensing is that if this statement turned out to be true, the change is not statistically significant. The words suggest to the reader (I agree, they do not say explicitly) that there will likely be measurable loss which I do not believe occurred.

5. Finally, there is our key judgment of the SNIE, "Our judgment--although it is a very close call--is that the GKR will be able to survive the coming round of military action" (p. 1). --Well, we were right. They did survive. However, we were very wrong in saying that it would be "a very close call". It wasn't. Certainly there was a lot of unpleasant events like the terror shelling of Phnom Penh but we must judiciously agree that the GKR has not been in extremis once this winter.

6. Now the purpose of all these comments is not simply to raise a lot of hate and discontent or to indiscriminately gore everyone's oxen. My purpose is different--seldom, if ever, does anyone get called on the carpet when the analysis is wrong if in its being wrong no U.S. interests are endangered. In our pleasure over the fact that Phnom Penh, Lon Nol, and the GKR are all intact, I think our analysis was wrong.

7. So you have to ask yourself where we went wrong. I would suggest that we went wrong in several places:

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a. The Military Net Assessment.

(1) The APA (Analyst Protective Association) can breathe a sigh of relief. Annex B of the SNIE provides all the arguments to support any case you want to defend, i.e., "we told you the KC were strong", "we told you the KC had weaknesses", "we told you the FANK had problems", "we told you that there were some improvements in the FANK".

(2) Be that as it may, Annex B is pretty much a chronicling of FANK's weaknesses (see paragraphs 1-11 of Annex B). The reader comes away with the impression that the FANK is pretty feckless and the KCs, while they too have problems, "the gains made by the KC during their 1973 offensive demonstrated the progress they have made toward molding an effective military structure." (p. 20)

(3) I am suggesting that where we may have gone wrong is in not closing our military analytical loop. We judged the KC and we judged the FANK but nowhere did we bite the bullet and in fact accomplish a net assessment.

(4) It looks very much like we fell into the same trap as we did occasionally with the analysis of VNAF vs. NVA/VC--seeing all the weaknesses of one side and, primarily, only the strengths of the other.

(5) I hate to sound like a broken record but there is a crying need for a net assessment. We need a fairly sophisticated effort in this direction and this seems like a good job for the defense attaches in Phnom Penh to come up with during the next 90 days.

b. The NVN-KC Relationship.

(1) A likely reason that option B didn't happen this year was because Hanoi did not wish to support it. Our recent assessments (in the CIB and NID) have adopted this line, i.e., it may be in the best interests of North Vietnam that the KC's war rock along inconclusively. The argument is that Hanoi has all it needs in SE Cambodia to pursue its interests in SVN. Therefore, NVN may well reason that it would be best to keep the fractious Khmers beholden to them for arms and materiel in a continuing inconclusive war.

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(2) Annex D (The North Vietnamese-Khmer Communist Relationship) of the SNIE doesn't tackle this possibility at all. Paragraph 24 of the basic SNIE does. However, a totally non-partisan rereading of that paragraph (para. 24) leads me to the conclusion that it is one of those "all things to all people" paragraphs. I do not know which of the four or five ideas advanced in that paragraph is considered the most likely NVN course of action.

c. NVN's Strategy for Indo-China.

Maybe this is where our attention has been the most inadequate. Given a battle between the KC and GKR in which the NVA remains on the sidelines, such a contest may well make the 30 Years War seem short. Therefore, our estimates likely hang more on Hanoi's willingness to become involved than we have stated to date. We should be watching this aspect particularly carefully.

8. I also reviewed the 31 January 1974 Memorandum to Holders (M to H) of SNIE 57-1-73 to see if my above judgments were unfair in that the early December conclusions had been modified significantly.

9. The M to H does report the fact that the intensity of the KC operations have not lived up to expectations yet the judgments persist that something between option A & B is likely to occur:

a. "Nonetheless, they [KC] still appear determined to try for a decisive military victory this year and the government's military forces (FANK) have not yet faced the brunt of the KC effort." (p. 4 M to H. Underscoring mine)

b. "The KC...can be expected to make a more strenuous attempt to close the Mekong." (p. 4 M to H)

c. "Evidence is accumulating that attacks against Phnom Penh itself are being planned." (p. 4 M to H)

d. The M to H reports the encouraging news that the Mekong has been kept open "and the KC military effort has been slow in gaining momentum." However, it closes with the statement that "these encouraging developments, however, may have been more than offset by the KC's improved supply situation which will allow them to sustain a high level of combat well beyond the dry season." (p. 5 M to H)

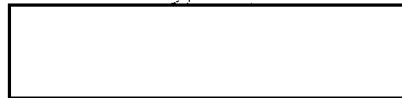
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10. The sensing I get from the SNIE and the M to H is that the wolf is still at the door. --It may be. However, I urge you to consider this thought in your next SNIE:

Did the KC insurgency (unless it receives massive external support to include NVA involvement) reach its peak performance in 1973? Has the high water mark of the faction ridden KC effort already passed? Do we have a sort of mini-Laos (circa 1965-1972) situation on our hands?

11. I wanted to provide you with these views before the upcoming meeting on SNIE 57-1-74. I think, as a community, we should enter our next Cambodian estimative effort with a clear recognition not of our happiness over the GKR still being there but of our recognition of the shortcomings of our last analytical effort.



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